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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 001179

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2016

TAGS: PREL PTER PINS MOPS RP

SUBJECT: "CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER": THE GRP PRESENTS ITS CASE ON PROCLAMATION 1017; EMBASSY ANALYSIS

REF: A. MANILA 995 AND PREVIOUS

1B. 05 MANILA 2572

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Paul W. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: In a March 9 diplomatic corps briefing, senior GRP officials laid out the case in support of the February 24 declaration of a State of National Emergency through Proclamation 1017. The GRP maintains that an "unholy alliance" of three groups -- Communist rebels and political allies, elements of the mainstream Opposition, and "habitually delinquent" members of the armed forces -- threatened the stability of the government. Clearly, elements of the armed forces sought to topple the Arroyo government by planning to "withdraw support" on the 20th anniversary of the People Power movement that overthrew President Marcos. On the question of a larger plot, we conclude that there likely were some additional efforts by the Communist rebels and some lower ranks of the military to overthrow the government. The extent of actual coordination with leftist and mainstream Opposition is unclear, but some support from these elements is logical. It is doubtful that the alleged plans of the Communist rebels, military elements and certain politicos were as well-coordinated or potentially bloody as the government suggests. Nonetheless, the GRP faces a real adversary in the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA), which will continue to try to undermine President Arroyo and her government. End Summary.

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"Clear and Present Danger"  
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12. (SBU) On March 9, Charge attended a diplomatic corps briefing in which the GRP laid out the case in support of the February 24 declaration of a State of National Emergency through Proclamation 1017 (Ref A). The briefing at the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) was led by Secretary of Foreign Affairs Alberto Romulo and co-chaired by Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita and Secretary of the Department of

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National Defense Avelino Cruz. Throughout the briefing, the three Cabinet officials repeatedly referred to a "clear and present danger" that had necessitated the GRP's actions. The centerpiece of the briefing was a 15-minute video entitled, "1017: The Weapon Against Betrayal." The video portrayed a strong link between three groups alleged by the GRP to be behind the threat: the CPP/NPA; rebel members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP); and, members of

leftist-front party list organizations, such as Bayan Muna, led by Representative Satur Ocampo. While the involvement of other Opposition figures in the alleged plot have been a subject of public discourse and private allegations, they were not discussed at the DFA meeting and only briefly mentioned in the video.

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The GRP's Story  
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¶3. (SBU) The video -- which received a wide distribution when it was shown on television before the March 9 briefing -- laid out the alleged strategy of the three groups. According to the narrative, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the CPP/NPA and rebel AFP soldiers was found February 21 on a computer drive taken from 1LT. Lawrence San Juan. (Note: San Juan had been imprisoned for his role in the 2003 Oakwood Mutiny, but escaped from his detention facility on January ¶17. He was recaptured on February 21 and his computer drive, which contained the MOA, was confiscated -- Ref B. End Note.). The MOA outlined the goals to: depose the Arroyo government; establish a transitional government; and, continue strengthening their forces. Destabilization by implementing one of three versions of "Oplan Hackle" would involve various degrees of force and allow takeover of the AFP, television stations and other communication facilities, the Senate, the House of Representatives, the Supreme Court, and other targets. A main component of Oplan Hackle involved left-wing party list organizations, whose job would be to facilitate rallies and marches that would escalate to 500,000 civilians headed towards Malacanang. The pressure from the protests would allow the CPP/NPA/AFP to initiate the "main event" and commence plans for a takeover.

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How Valid Are These Claims?  
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¶4. (C) The GRP claims to source the information from multiple documents, interrogations, and debriefings. According to the GRP, it first learned of the existence of "Oplan Hackle" on January 16, after discovering that a January 10 clandestine meeting had been held in Makati involving San Juan (supposedly on a "temporary pass" from his detention facility) and other rebel junior officers. Additional information on "Oplan Hackle" emerged after San Juan's escape, allegedly from documents recovered from his detention cell and subsequent debriefings/interrogations of persons implicated in the supposed operation. The documents allegedly recovered from San Juan's computer drive include: minutes from a November 10, 2005 meeting between elements of the military sector and representatives of the CPP; minutes from a February 20 meeting between the same persons; and, a memorandum of agreement between AFP rebels and CPP/NPA counterparts (see para three above for more information on the MOA).

¶5. (C) While the writing style and language of the three documents are similar to known examples of CPP/NPA writing and appear to be authentic, the information contained in them does not fully support the GRP conclusions. Discrepancies in GRP claims and GRP supporting evidence can be broken down into the following categories:

- a. Links between AFP and NPA: the documents said to have been recovered from San Juan indicate that some military-rightist elements indeed met with representatives of the CPP. Only one active duty AFP officer (speaking on behalf of junior officers) is identifiable from the transcript of the meeting. Senior active duty officers are spoken of only in the third person. Indeed, in the transcript, the apparent head of the military-associated elements acknowledges that they do not have direct control

over any anti-administration elements in the active duty military. Thus, there is no clear indication of a genuine agreement between any active duty military officers and the CPP/NPA, other than the one unidentified officer claiming to represent junior officers (whom the GRP claims was San Juan) while describing other attendees as retired military officers. That said, the NPA has historically recruited from within the AFP and attempted to maintain secret links with disgruntled soldiers through its "Lt Crispin Tagamolila Command," named after a AFP officer who defected to the NPA in 1971. A link to the Lt Crispin Tagamolila Command previously existed on the NPA website but was removed sometime within the past month. Since 1971, a number of high-ranking AFP officers and hundreds of lower ranking troops have defected to the NPA;

b. Links between leftist organizations and the CPP: in its presentation, the GRP alleged that direct ties exist between the CPP/NPA and the Congressional party list groups Bayan Muna, Gabriela, Migrante, and Anak Pawis (which have a total of six congressional representatives, one of whom is presently in detention while the other five are currently in the custody of the House of Representatives). There is logic behind this assertion, but no direct evidence. In the past few years, the CPP created a number of left wing front organizations under its United Front Commission. The CPP actively seeks to influence pre-existing or "progressive" organizations through penetration, coalitions, and/or common actions. While the CPP ties to Gabriela, Migrante, and Anakpawis are unclear, we have evidence the CPP formed Bayan Muna to participate in Congressional elections as a party list organization. Gabriela and Anak Pawis leaders are former Bayan Muna members, suggesting but not proving that the parties are linked (and thus, potentially linked to CPP/NPA as well). Migrante is "commonly known" to be linked to CPP/NPA and the other party list organizations, but no direct evidence of this exists. (Note: Party list candidates represent "disenfranchised" sectors or communities and not/not ideologies. They do not compete head-to-head for congressional seats but only need to garner two percent of the party list votes nationwide to win one seat for a maximum allocation of three seats for any single party list. End Note);

c. Oplan Hackle: despite the GRP's assertions in its "1017" video, the documents from the alleged meetings indicate no plan to take over multiple vital installations in a military action. The AFP's initial report on "Oplan Hackle" after San

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Juan's January 17 escape (and before his February 21 recapture) made no mention of an alliance with the CPP/NPA. Further, the documents that purportedly detail the minutes of the February 20 meeting do not mention "Oplan Hackle," but rather discuss the military component of a civil-military action referred to as "Oplan 4G." In this plan -- should political developments warrant it -- the rebel military would seize a vital installation and declare that spot as the seat of a civilian-led transition government, with the possibility of similar actions in rural areas where anti-administration forces are strongest;

d. Opposition involvement: despite allegations in Proclamation 1017 that mainstream Opposition figures in addition to the extreme left were a key element of a larger strategy, the Diplomatic Corps briefing and video did not focus on this aspect. Documents from the alleged February 20 meeting between the unidentified AFP officer and CPP/NPA elements assert there was some discourse on how to involve other groups in the effort, including the support of Opposition street protests and how Opposition and other (even neutral) figures could be incorporated into a governing "council" should Arroyo be removed. Among those groups/personalities the CPP/NPA/AFP group discussed were the Catholic Bishop's Council of the Philippines and former President Joseph Estrada. Separately, Senator Gordon told

Charge that he was approached by coup plotters, and Senator Lacson has told the press of several approaches, all of which were turned down.

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Conclusion: Less Than Meets the Eye, but....  
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¶ 6. (C) Overall, we conclude that there was an effort to destabilize the GRP, going beyond a simple "withdrawal of support" by senior elements of the military. However, it is not clear that the plans were as well coordinated or potentially bloody as the GRP suggests. Despite claims of a broad conspiracy involving the CPP/NPA, rebel factions of the AFP, left-wing party-list organizations, and other Opposition groups, we have seen little evidence to suggest that the efforts at destabilization were this cohesive. While ILT San Juan apparently did meet with some CPP/NPA members, the CPP/NPA/AFP relationship appears to have ended there, with no senior active duty AFP members involved. At the same time, however, Brigadier General Danilo Lim and Marine Colonel Ariel Querubin were preparing to withdraw support from the government during the 20th anniversary of the People Power that overthrew President Marcos. It was perhaps this confluence of possibly separate efforts to destabilize the government that triggered the President to declare a State of National Emergency. There is no clear evidence that mainstream Opposition members were involved in the strategy, although Opposition leaders admit privately that they at least maintain contacts with many in the AFP, including elements unhappy with President Arroyo's leadership. They have not admitted to us any direct links with CPP/NPA leaders, but years of on-again, off-again negotiations between the GRP and the CPP/NPA have undoubtedly created ties and perhaps alliances.

¶ 7. (C) While the GRP's assertions regarding the CPP's role in the February 24 coup attempt seem tenuous, the government nonetheless faces a real -- and often deadly -- adversary in the CPP/NPA. Through its continuing political and military activities, its calls for the overthrow of the government, and its destabilization efforts in the countryside, the CPP/NPA clearly remains a genuine threat.

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